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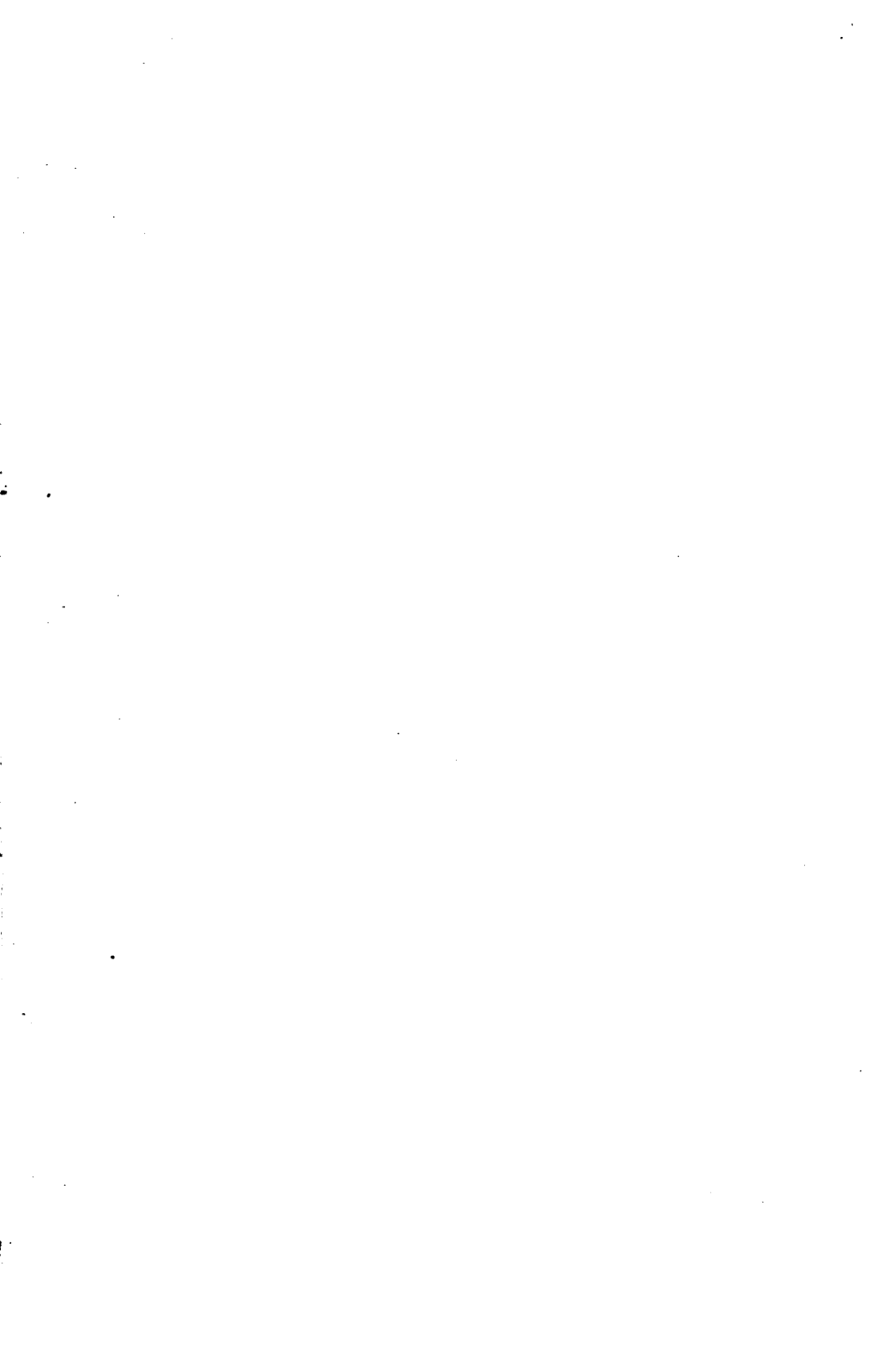
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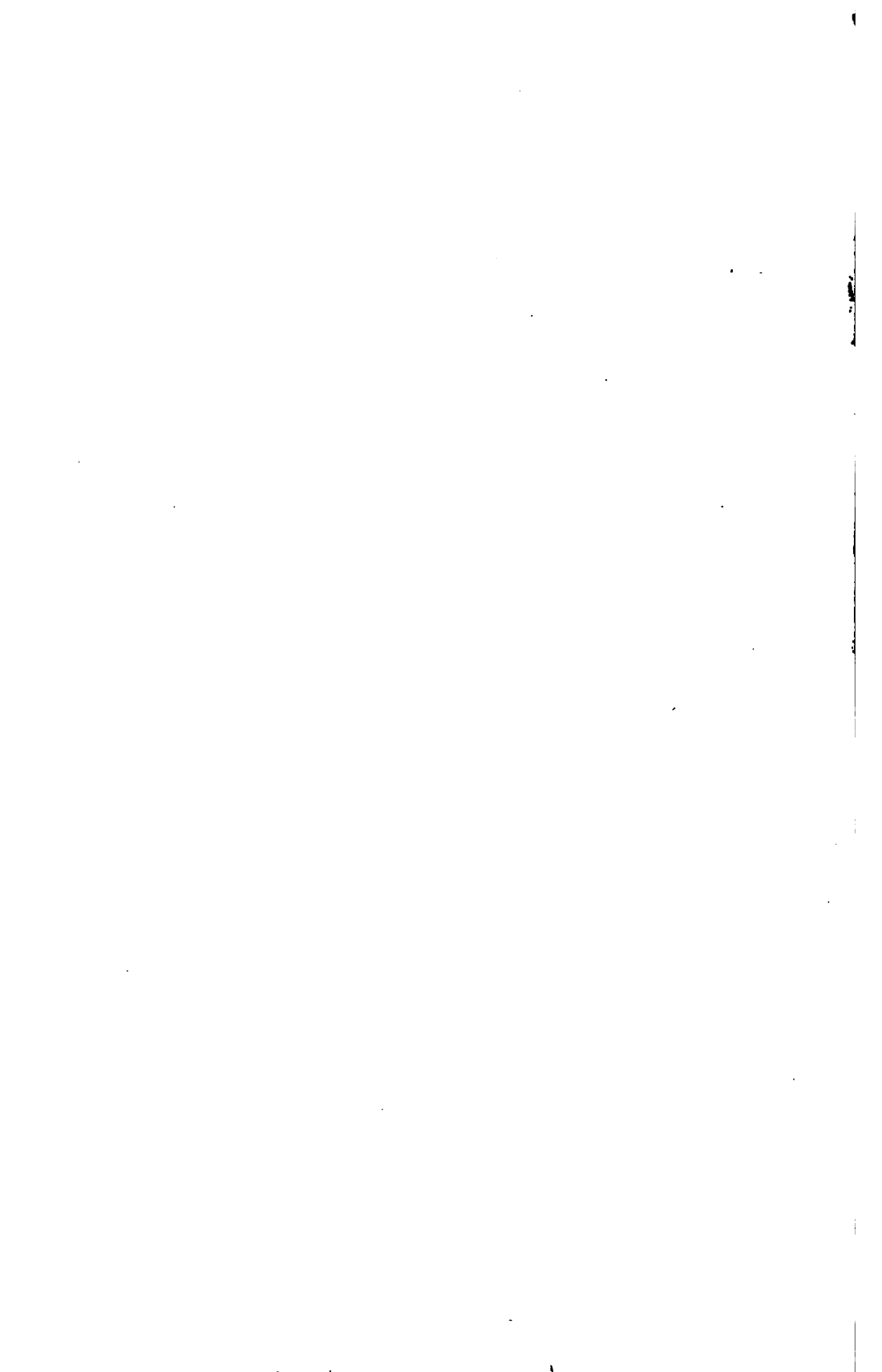
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# HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

One hundred and Twenty-fifth  
Anniversary of the Dedication

FIRST BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

SUNDAY, MAY 27, 1900

HENRY MELVILLE KING  
Pastor

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# HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE

DEDICATION OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE,

PROVIDENCE, R. I.,

SUNDAY, MAY 27, 1900,

BY

HENRY MELVILLE KING,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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PROVIDENCE:  
PRESS OF F. H. TOWNSEND,  
1900



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PROVIDENCE, June 11, 1900.

At the Annual Meeting of the Charitable Baptist Society, held this day, the following votes were passed :

Voted,

"That, appreciating the very valuable addition to our history in the discourse delivered by the Rev. Dr. King, Sunday, May 27th, 1900, on the occasion of the 125th Anniversary of the dedication of our Meeting-house, we do request of him a copy for publication."

Voted,

"That Mr. C. H. Guild be a committee to notify Dr. King of this action of the Society, and to make the necessary arrangements for publication."

Attest,

F. T. GUILD, *Clerk.*

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PARSONAGE OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH.

PROVIDENCE, June 13, 1900.

MR. CLARENCE H. GUILD :

*Dear Sir :*

I herewith submit to you the manuscript of the Discourse preached on the 125th Anniversary of the Dedication of our Meeting-house, and requested by the Charitable Baptist Society for publication.

Sincerely yours,

*Henry W. King*

*"This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven."*—GEN. xxviii: 17.

On the twenty-eighth day of this month (to-morrow) will occur the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the dedication of this house of worship. At the ninetieth anniversary of that important event, May 28, 1865, Rev. Samuel L. Caldwell, D.D., the pastor of the Church, delivered an appropriate commemorative discourse. On the one hundredth anniversary, May 28, 1875, Hon. Samuel Greene Arnold, the president of the Charitable Baptist Society, which from the beginning has held this property in trust for the use of the Church, delivered before that body a very complete historical address. Both of these discourses have been published, and are accessible. They leave little to be added to the interesting statement of facts which they give in reference to the building and preservation of this venerable edifice down to the dates of their delivery. All subsequent historians must acknowledge their great indebtedness to them.

A quarter of a century has now passed away since Governor Arnold's address was spoken, and the meeting-house still stands, having lost none of its architectural

beauty, but being clothed with the added sacredness of an increasing antiquity, a monument to the generosity, the self-sacrifice, the wise foresight of its builders, and a conspicuous landmark in this ancient and rapidly growing municipality. It seems fitting, possibly demanded, now that the definite period of a century and a quarter has elapsed since the doors of this sanctuary were opened, that we should recall to mind something of its history, and reflect for a few moments upon its relation to the life of man which has been lived about it, and the long service which it has rendered to God and truth and humanity.

This Church, as you are already aware, had had from its organization in 1638 but two meeting-houses before the erection of this one. During the first sixty-two years of its existence it had no home and no shelter except such as it found in the humble and hospitable dwellings of its members. It was literally "the Church that was in their house." When the weather permitted, worship was held in the open air, with the blue sky for the roof of their sanctuary, the branches of the trees for its arches, and the winds for its music. We are told that at that time "there was no public building in the town even for civil purposes." The ancient record reads that in June 1676, the annual town meeting was held "before Thomas Field's house, under a tree, by the water-side."\*

The first Meeting-house was erected in 1700 on a lot of land near the corner of North Main and Smith

\*Staples' Annals of Providence, p. 169.

streets, and erected by the pastor, Elder Pardon Tillinghast, at his own charges.\* It was small and unattractive, not larger than the little house in which Roger Williams preached in Salem, and which is now to be seen on the grounds of the Essex Institute. Yet it was in keeping with the homes of the people. Subsequently the pastor deeded this property to the Church in due form, the deed being now on record at the City Hall,† and showing that the Church then held to the Six Principle position which was supposed to be laid down in Heb. VI: 1-2.‡

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment."

Tradition says that that first house was "in the shape of a hay-cap, with a fire-place in the middle, the smoke escaping from a hole in the roof."||

That house served its sacred purpose for twenty-six years, the praises of the little group of hardy disciples, whose hearts had been kindled by a heavenly fire, ascending with the smoke that rose from the open hearth.

In 1726 under the ministry of Rev. James Brown,

\*Pardon Tillinghast became a citizen of the town in 1646, and retained his connection with the Church as private member and pastor until his death in 1718. As pastor, for probably thirty-six years, he served without salary, as did the other early pastors, although he declared it to be the duty of the Church to support the ministry which should come after him. (Backus' Hist. II. p. 22). He was evidently well to do, and wielded a large influence in Church and town for an unusually long lifetime. His descendants have erected a monument to his memory on Benefit street.

† Recorded April 22, 1749.

‡ See The Mother Church, p. 51.

|| Knowles' Life of Roger Williams, p. 175.

the grandson of Chad Brown who had so much to do with the founding of this colony and this Church, and whose descendants down to the present time have been most generous contributors to the religious, educational, literary and commercial interests of Providence,\* a second Meeting-house was erected on the same spot where the first had stood. This building was a little more pretentious, being forty feet square and covering exactly one-quarter of the ground space of our present Meeting-house. The community had been slowly growing, and contained a population not much exceeding 2000. With the gradual growth there came a divergence of religious views, and other denominations of Christians sprang up, and took organized form in this land of religious freedom. St. John's Church, which was then King's Church, had built a house three years before on its present site (1723), and the first Congregational Meeting-house was built the same year (1723), at the corner of College and Benefit streets. The Friends were also engaged in erecting a Meeting-house for their simple worship on the land still occupied by them. It may be that this enterprise on the part of other Christians inspired the Baptists with a desire to have a more commodious and attractive house of worship. The first comers must not be outdone by those who came later. 7 The new house had a central aisle extending from the door

\* "But in all that group of sterling, famous men, the colleagues of Roger Williams, not one was more able, upright and spotless than the Rev. Chad Brown, and the descendants of that heavenly minded man have had greater influence upon the fortunes of this city than the offspring of any other man living or dead." Moses Brown; a Sketch by Augustine Jones, LL. B.

to the pulpit, with pews on either side, or if not pews at the first, the plain benches soon gave place to them. There was also a small gallery with an entrance on the south side of the building, and "at high water," we are told, "the tide flowed nearly up to the west end."\* Here for nearly fifty years the message of life was proclaimed, and the people waited upon a ministry chosen from among themselves, Brown, Winsor, father and son, and Burlingame, men without the advantages of a liberal education, but with profound piety and with great strength and tenacity of conviction, still holding, with not a few of the members, to the laying on of hands as an essential and perpetual ordinance of Christianity, "rigorous for a doubtful and unessential rite," as Dr. Caldwell has well defined it.†

For more than one hundred and thirty years the Church had existed, sometimes agitated by doctrinal differences, and its life probably narrow and unaggressive, and yet all along, as at the first, having strong men connected with it, who only needed the occasion and the leader to draw them out, and show what was in them. In 1770 the Church had only 118 members, and seemed quite content to go on in its little way, which was hardly going on at all. But a new era was about to dawn, an era of quickening, of enlargement, of material and spiritual progress. In that year Rhode Island College was transferred from Warren to Providence, brought here by the generous offers of men

\* Life of John Howland, p. 29.

† Discourse at the Ninetieth Anniversary, p. 10.

connected with the First Baptist Church, who were awaking to a desire for a new and better condition of things. The College brought its young president, James Manning, with it, a man of broad culture, of liberal spirit, and of tremendous purpose and energy. Soon the spirit of revival broke out in the congregation, and more than a hundred members were added to the Church. The men whom God had been raising up, who were just coming into active life, felt the new impulse, both human and divine, and yielded to it. Indeed, there was the throbbing of a new life everywhere, not only in this city, but in all the Colonies. The spirit of freedom was in the air, and that meant growth, consecration, sacrifice, intelligence, expansion. It is worthy of note that this building was completed and dedicated in those memorable days between Lexington and Bunker Hill.

Governor Arnold says :

"Another season was dawning upon the world, and quiet village and torpid church alike felt the renewing air of an intellectual and moral spring time. The ancient narrowness was giving place to the modern breadth, in religious observances, as in all else. The Church, which, in the spirit of the Quakers, had condemned music and discarded singing in its worship \* \* \* \* awakened at last to a higher and truer estimate of its destinies and its work. The most progressive age the world has ever known began with the last quarter of the eighteenth century ; and this Church and Society—the latter just then organized—largely partook of that energy and progress. To us this consecrated House of God was the first fruit of the age of revolution."\*

The coming of the College, the personality and powerful preaching of Manning, the great awakening of

\* Address at the one hundredth anniversary, p. 13.

the Church and consequent increase in members and congregation, the new and larger and more progressive life in the community and in the Colonies which were about to embark upon the courageous experiment of an independent national existence, all conspired to break the shell of a narrow, but honorable past, and lead the even then venerable Church into a new and broader, more liberal and more vigorous existence. The young College had just been housed in the fine structure known as University Hall.\* The old Church must have a house better suited to its broadening spirit, its expanding life and its growing necessities. Both College and Church were animated by the spirit of a sublime and prophetic hopefulness. Whatever might be the issue of the incipient revolution against the authority and oppression of the mother country, education would live, and religion would live and thrive among the people.

The Charitable Baptist Society was chartered in the year of Our Lord, 1774, and "the fourteenth of the reign of His Most Sacred Majesty, George the Third." On Friday, February the 11th of that year, at the first meeting of the Society whose record has been preserved, a meeting held at the house of Daniel Cahoone, it was

*Resolved*, That we will all heartily unite as one man, in all lawful ways and means, to promote the good of this Society; and particularly to attend to and revive the affair of building a Meeting-house for the public worship of Almighty God, and also for holding Commencement in.

This record indicates two things. First, that a

\* See Dr. R. A. Guild's *Brown University and Manning*, p. 181.



new Meeting-house had been previously a subject of consideration, indeed, that the organization of a Society to be legally chartered had probably grown out of that discussion, for at its first meeting it proceeded to put on record its formal declaration of purpose and object. The charter was granted by the General Assembly, May 4. And secondly, that the Church in the erection of a new house of worship thought not simply of its own needs, but of the needs of the neighboring College. Governor Arnold says "The close relation between the Society and the College here appears in the very first record of its meetings; and all along through the century this intimate connection has been maintained."

At the second meeting of the Society held seven days after the first, in the house of Joseph Brown, one of the four distinguished brothers, who were descendants of Chad Brown,\* it was resolved to proceed to purchase the lots for the new edifice, and William Russel, an Episcopalian, was requested to act as middleman, John Angell, the owner, being a Gortonist, and said to be unwilling to sell the land for Baptist uses.† In two days the purchase was made, and the thanks of the Society were returned to Mr. Russel. Five days after, or two weeks from the first meeting, a committee was despatched to Boston to examine styles of church architecture, and another committee was appointed to

\*The names of the brothers were Nicholas, Joseph, John and Moses. The first three were active supporters of this Church. Moses was an influential Friend.

† See Governor's Arnold's Address, p. 6; also Brown University and Manning, p. 219, and Dr. Caldwell's Discourse, p. 12.

contract for the oak timber needed for the proposed building. In March additional land was purchased and the dimensions of the new house were determined upon, viz. eighty feet square with a lofty steeple. In April the draft of the charter was adopted, and the charter applied for, and a building committee appointed, of which John Brown was chairman, and Ephraim Wheaton treasurer, with a subscription list already in active operation. The style of the Boston churches did not please the committee, and Joseph Brown himself became the architect of the new building.\* The beautiful steeple was modeled from a drawing made for the Church of St. Martin's in the Fields, near Charing Cross, London, contained in Gibbs' "Designs of Buildings and Ornaments." Gibbs was a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, whose monument is the noble pile of St. Paul's in London.

The great undertaking projected, the lots selected and purchased, the committees appointed, the plans accepted, the charter secured, the subscriptions well started, on the first of June ground was broken, and on the twenty-ninth of August the frame of the stately edifice went up, it is said, "amid the rejoicings of the whole town." The rapidity with which the enterprise was pushed forward was indicative of the awakened zeal of the long slumbering people, and must have been an astonishment unto themselves and their neighbors.

\*Joseph Brown was chairman of the committee to visit Boston. He was afterwards Professor of Experimental Philosophy in the College. John Brown was chairman of the Building Committee. Nicholas Brown was the first moderator of the Society.

Four other charters to religious societies had been granted by the General Assembly of the State before this one, viz., to Trinity Church, Newport, five years before ; Benevolent Congregational, Providence, four years before ; Second Congregational, Newport, three years before ; and St. John's, Providence, two years before. In the preamble of the charter of this Society the petitioners are described as "being the oldest Christian Church in the State or Colony, and professing to believe that water baptism ought to be administered by immersion only, and that professed believers in Jesus Christ, and no others, are proper subjects of the same." These words set forth the priority of this Church, and its character as a Baptist Church from the beginning.\* The testimony was that of an unbroken line. The builders of this material edifice must have been acquainted with those, who had been personally acquainted with some of the founders of the spiritual church in 1638, before they were called home to glory.

It is also worthy of remark that at the first meeting of the Society after the act of incorporation had been passed, a form of subscription was adopted which set forth the fundamental principles of Baptist churches always and everywhere, viz., voluntaryism in the support of worship and absolute religious liberty for every man ; principles, which though generally accepted now, once distinguished and differentiated Baptists from other Christians no less than their practice of baptism and their view of a regenerated and spiritual

\* See The Mother Church, pp. 67-79.

membership of the Church. The language is so clear and striking that it is worthy of repeated quotation.

"Said charter doth not empower them to raise any monies for the uses specified any otherwise than by voluntary subscriptions, contributions, legacies and donations, which clause in said charter is most especially agreeable to the minds and principles of said Baptist Church and congregation, they being the successors and descendants of the first Christian inhabitants of this Colony, who fled hither to enjoy, and to secure to themselves and posterity, religious, as well as civil, liberty, more fully and amply than they could in any other part of the British Dominions; and being desirous therein still to continue and preserve inviolate that religious liberty, not only procured at so dear a rate for them by their pious ancestors, and transmitted down through many generations unto the present day, but also authorized and established by Jesus Christ, the Head and only Law Giver to His Church, and being a natural right, which God himself, the Creator and Governor of the universe, has bestowed on every individual of the human race, most fully, freely and amply to enjoy the liberty of conscience and private judgment in whatever refers immediately to his worship, in that he hath assured us that each one must give an account for himself unto God."

No truer, no grander, no more unanswerable Magna Charta of human liberties was ever penned. The men who wrote it and subscribed to it one hundred and twenty-five years ago, in this little town of Providence, were gifted with large vision, profound insight and sublime wisdom. They were the worthy successors of the immortal Roger Williams, and his Baptist progenitors.\*

\*Confession of Baptist Church in London in 1614—"The magistrate, by virtue of his office, is not to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, nor to compel men to this or that form of religion; but to leave the Christian religion to the free conscience of anyone, and to meddle only with political matters. Christ alone is the King and Law-giver of the Church and conscience."

Confession of the Seven Particular Baptist Churches in London in 1644—"Concerning the worship of God, there is but one Law-giver, which is able to save and destroy, which is Jesus Christ. . . . It is the magistrate's duty to tender the liberty of men's consciences (which is the tenderest thing unto all conscientious men, and most dear unto them, and without which all other liberties will not be worth the naming, much less enjoying), and to protect all under them from all wrong, injury, oppression and molestation."

In nine months from the raising of the frame of the house, it was sufficiently completed to warrant the public service of dedication on May 28, 1775. President Manning preached the sermon from Gen. xxviii: 17, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven," and a great company of rejoicing people were assembled to celebrate the successful achievement of a great and noble enterprise, and to give to God and the uses of religion and Christian education this beautiful and stately edifice. Beautiful and stately still, it must have been an object of special admiration in those days of feeble beginnings and narrow surroundings. Many a prayer undoubtedly ascended that the beauty of the Lord would fill and crown the material structure, and that He would establish the work of the hands of His people, prayers that have been abundantly answered in the history of a century and a quarter. Nine days afterward, on June 6, the steeple was lifted to its place, and with its graceful lines and tapering spire, in sunshine and in storm, it has pointed the thoughts of the passing generations to "fairer worlds on high."

The old Meeting-house and ground had been sold for £420, of which a satisfactory portion was given to the members who held strongly to the Six Principle views, and withdrew with the pastor, Mr. Winsor, and organized a church of that faith in Johnston.\* The new Meeting-house cost about £7,000, of this sum £2,000 were raised by a lottery authorized by the State, a

\* See *The Mother Church*, pp. 61, 62.

method of raising money for church purposes and other public objects frequently adopted at that time, against which the fathers had no moral objection and in which they saw no inconsistency, or at least they may have felt, as some good people feel to-day, that the permission of the legislature justifies anything, that whatever is licensed and legal is without sin. The Congregational Church, King's Church (now St. John's) and other churches in the city and State were permitted to raise money in the same manner to meet their needs. It is recorded by Hon. John H. Stiness, the historian of "Lotteries in Rhode Island,"\* that "In August, 1774, authority was given to draw the first class of the lottery for the Baptist Meeting-house in Providence in September instead of October, as all the tickets had been sold," so eager was the public to assist in the erection of this Meeting-house, or—to get a lottery prize.

It should be said, however, that the Charitable Baptist Society, actuated either by a sense of humiliation or of doubt as to the morality of this method of raising money, expressly stated that they would not have resorted to the lottery "had they not purchased as much more land, and designed a house as much larger than the Society required for their own use (purposely to accommodate public commencements,) as will amount to the full sum proposed to be raised by this lottery." But such a method has passed away in this State and country, never again to be authorized by legislative

\* Rhode Island Historical Tracts, No. 3 (second series), pp. 40-43.

enactment or sanctioned by intelligent Christian sentiment.

The breaking out of the War of the Revolution, the wide-spread disturbances, the exhaustion of resources, the scattering of the congregation, postponed the full completion of the house for a number of years. At that time, and for that cause, the College was broken up, and its building was used for a hospital and for barracks for the soldiers.\* It was in 1787 that the steeple was painted, and the basement was plastered in imitation of stone-work. In 1789 sixty pews were ordered to be built in the galleries, and it appears from the record that they were needed to accommodate the ordinary congregations on Sunday, for it reads, "this would leave about twenty feet for seats or benches to accommodate strangers."

Here, then, was the Meeting-house at last fully completed, according to the original purpose, equipped and occupied. It was eighty feet square, with a spire rising to the height of two hundred feet. It had 126 old-fashioned square pews on the floor, in which half of the people were compelled to sit with their backs towards the preacher, or, as an Irishman would say, with their backs facing the preacher, with doors of entrance into the house on four sides, with broad aisles crossing each other at right angles in the centre, with its lofty pulpit and conspicuous sounding board which contained the ever-present suggestion of the possibility of its yielding to the power of gravitation, with its deep galleries on

\* Dr. R. A. Guild's *Manning and Brown University*, p. 243.

three sides and a top gallery at the west end for negro worshippers, of whom the congregation had many at that time, about one-ninth of the members of the church being of that race,\* and with its wide windows through which an abundance of light streamed, its strong pillars with large Doric capitals, and its symmetrical arches supporting a lofty ceiling nearly 6,500 square feet in size. Within and without it was a splendid specimen of colonial architecture. Governor Arnold does not hesitate to speak of it as "a building far surpassing any then existing on this Continent for the worship of God, and which to-day (that is, in 1875,) has few, if any, equals, and no superior in many points of architectural elegance."

When it is remembered that in 1775 Providence contained a population of but little more than 4,300, in 650 families, of whom two-thirds were on this side of the river; that there were not more than eight dwelling houses on Benefit street, and not more than five on Westminster street, and that there was but a single public school-house, it will be seen that the erection of a Meeting-house so large and so costly as this, with a seating capacity of hardly less than 1,400, was a labor not only of great generosity, but of remarkable faith and far-seeing wisdom.

The time will permit only a brief statement of some of the changes which have been made in this ancient edifice, as required by the passing years, the changing tastes, or the increasing needs of the people.

\* Governor Arnold's Address, p. 13.



The clock which went up with the spire, or soon after, marked the hours of the day and the rapid flight of time for all the people of the town for nearly a century. In 1873 a public-spirited citizen, Mr. Henry C. Packard, thinking it important that the people should know by night as well as by day, if they chanced to be on the street, that the unresting hours were moving on, secured the privilege of substituting a new and modern clock with ever-shining faces for the old one. The original black wooden dials with gilt figures gave way to illuminated dials.\* The new clock was put in at an expense of \$4,200.00, and the care and lighting cost more than \$400.00 each year. This expense Mr. Packard met personally for a time, but was not able to make provision for it permanently, so that when the light of his generosity went out, the light of the clock went out also.

The bell in the steeple has had a varied and interesting history, not only summoning the willing and unwilling people to the worship of God for a century and a quarter, and sending out its sad or joyful tones as events of local or national interest might dictate, but welcoming, day after day and year after year, the faithful sun as it rises in the eastern sky, marking the hour when the weary laborer should take his noon-tide rest and refreshment, and also the hour when, the day's toil over, he should retire to his nightly slumber. It weighed originally 2,515 pounds, and was imported from London.

\*The old clock with its dials was transferred to the tower of the Congdon Street Baptist Church.

On it was a quaint inscription, indicative of the new freedom which was asserted and enjoyed in this Colony, and the relation of this, the oldest, Christian Church to it.

"For freedom of conscience the town was first planted,  
Persuasion, not force, was used by the people :  
This Church is the eldest, and has not recanted,  
Enjoying and granting bell, temple and steeple."

Such things were under the ban to all dissenters in the land from which they had fled. Here they planted "a Church without a bishop and a State without a king." The building itself, with its towering steeple, should fling defiance in the face of all imposed human authority, and every stroke of the bell should be a glad note of freedom.

In the spring of 1787 the bell was cracked while being rung, and was re-cast in this country, its weight being slightly diminished, viz., 2,337 pounds. A new inscription was placed upon it—"This Church was formed A. D. 1639, the first in the State and the oldest of the Baptists in America." In March, 1844, it was again broken and re-cast, and again in September of the same year, owing to some defect in the workmanship. Its present inscription is, "This Church was founded in 1639 by Roger Williams, its first pastor, and the first asserter of liberty of conscience. It was the first Church in Rhode Island, and the first Baptist Church in America."\* These inscriptions express the unbroken

\* In 1899 the Church by vote changed the date of its origin from 1639 to 1638, in order to bring it into harmony with the accredited facts and the judgment of all historians. See Minutes of the Warren Baptist Association for 1899 for a record of the action of the Church and the reasons therefor.

faith of the Church and the community in its priority, and the connection of Roger Williams with its organization. \*

On May 29, 1791, Nicholas Brown, the generous friend of the Church, died, "yet did not take away with him the spirit of beneficence, but left it as a heritage and crown to his family, and to be the glory of letters and religion here through other generations."† In 1792 the son, bearing the same name, contributed \$2,000.00 to procure a lot of ground and build a parsonage thereon, which lot still remains in the possession of this Society, though the old parsonage, which served well its purpose as the home of the pastors for eighty-one years, has given place to a new and more modern one.‡ In

\* See The Baptism of Roger Williams for proof of his immersion and connection with the origin of this church.

† Dr. Caldwell's Discourse, p. 16. The same year of Nicholas Brown's death, two months later, President Manning followed his friend to the other world, dying July 29. A hearse imported from England by the Baptist Society was used for the first time at Dr. Manning's funeral. Manning and Brown University, p. 45.

‡ The son was Moderator of the Charitable Baptist Society for thirty-two years, until his death, November 27, 1841, and, like the father, was a generous benefactor of the Church and the College. On account of his large gifts, the name of Rhode Island College was changed in 1804 to Brown University. In 1822 he erected, at his own expense, and presented to the University its second building, named, at his suggestion, "Hope College," in honor of his sister, Mrs. Hope Ives; and in 1836 he erected the third College building, which, at his request, was named "Manning Hall," in honor of the first President, who was his revered teacher. It should be added, as illustrative of the spirit which has descended in the family, that John Carter Brown, son of Nicholas Brown, 2d, gave to the University its handsome Library building, erected in 1878 at an expense of nearly \$100,000.00; and that his grandson, John Nicholas Brown, in addition to generous gifts (\$50,000.00) towards the endowment of the University, contributed to the City of Providence its elegant Public Library building, costing about \$270,000.00, which was dedicated March 15, 1900, only a few weeks before his lamented death. A second grandson, Harold Brown, whose death a few days after his brother's gave a fresh shock to the community, also showed his regard for the University which bears the family name by a like gift of \$50,000.00 to its endowment.

the same year, Mr. Brown's daughter, Hope, presented to the Church the beautiful crystal chandelier which still adorns our sanctuary. It is said to have been lighted for the first time on the evening of her marriage to Mr. Thomas Poynton Ives. The widow, Mrs. Avis Brown, also gave £50 to the fund for the support of the ministry.

Although the general architectural proportions of the Meeting-house remain undisturbed after the lapse of a century and a quarter, many changes have been introduced, all supposed to be demanded by the comfort and the enlarging activity of the Church and congregation. In 1802 alterations were begun in the basement, which had previously been rented as a cellar, and have gone on from time to time by excavation and increase of available space, until now the entire basement is utilized for the purposes of the prayer meetings, the Sunday School (which was organized in 1819) and the social life of the Church.

In the winter of 1822-1823 stoves were introduced for warming the main audience room. There are persons still living who can recall the picture of families passing up the aisles, followed by servants bearing foot-stoves and placing them in the pews. The greatest changes were made in 1832, when the 126 square pews were removed and the present long pews with doors were constructed, with a re-arrangement of the aisles, when the lofty pulpit was brought down nearer to the people and the minister humbled from his high elevation, and the sounding-board disappeared, and when the upper

gallery at the west end was taken away to make room for the organ, whose coming had been discussed and whose coming shadow had been seen for several years. The Church had introduced singing into its worship sixty years before. Indeed, one reason assigned for the withdrawal of the pastor, Rev. Samuel Winsor, Jr., from the Church in 1771 was because "singing in public worship was very disgusting to him." The bass-viol was introduced, notwithstanding some opposition, in 1804.\* The organ was finally put up in 1834, and was the gift of Mr. Nicholas Brown, as was also the clock in front of the gallery, which made its appearance in the following year. In 1838 a baptistry was constructed beneath the pulpit, the surroundings between Fox and India Points rendering the place, which had long been used, unsuited for the administration of that solemn and beautifully significant rite of Christianity. In 1850 the tallow candles of the olden time and the oil lamps of a later period were superseded by illuminating gas. And in 1884, the year in which the new parsonage was erected, the projection in the rear of the pulpit was constructed,† furnishing space for an ever open baptistry

\* Governor Arnold is authority for the following traditional witticism: An opponent of the proposed instrument declared that "to use a fiddle in the house of God would be a *base violation* of the sacredness of worship."

† The cost of the parsonage was about \$16,000.00, and \$18,000.00 were expended in improvements on the Meeting-house at this time. The parsonage was dedicated by a parish gathering and appropriate ceremony November 13, 1884, and the house of worship was re-opened February 8, 1885, the pastor, Rev. T. Edwin Brown, D. D., under whose leadership this great enterprise had been undertaken and carried through, preaching an appropriate sermon on "Gifts, the Measure of Requirements," from Luke xii: 48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." A new organ was included in the improvements. The case of the old organ and a few of the wooden pipes were retained.

with its silent but eloquent testimony to the buried and risen Christ, the foundation of all-saving faith and immortal hope, and providing an ample platform for the elegant pulpit and its rich furniture, which was the loving gift of Mrs. Anne Brown Francis Woods.

At the same time the memorial window representing the "Baptism of Christ" was placed above the baptistry in memory of Mrs. Hope Ives, the daughter of Nicholas Brown, by her grand-daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth A. Ives Gammell, wife of Prof. Wm. Gammell. It should be remarked that for many years noble Christian women have been among the warmest supporters and benefactors of this Church.

The grounds surrounding the building have been three times diminished by the city authorities, strips being taken for the widening of Benefit street, of Waterman street (formerly President street) and of North Main street. The original apple trees of John Angell's orchard gave place early in this century to the Lombardy poplars, which stood like sentinels keeping guard about the house of God, and these in turn, in 1832, to the graceful elms which wave their arms in refreshing benediction above the green lawn. The picket fence which enclosed the entire grounds for a full century, having been erected in fulfilment of a condition specified in the munificent gifts of the Brown family in 1792, "that the Meeting-house yard shall be decently and handsomely enclosed," and having been repaired many times, was in part blown down in a severe storm, and its complete removal authorized by the Society in

1892, and has not been replaced. The open lawn furnishes a delightful resting place for the weary during the summer heat, and the walks across the grounds are much used thoroughfares and a great public convenience all the year round.\*

Such are the principal changes which have taken place in this property during the century and a quarter since it was given to God. The most of them were necessitated by the changing tastes of the people and the needs of a progressive Church. None of them have impaired the affection and veneration which are cherished for this ancient sanctuary. For a hundred and twenty-five years it has stood in silent strength and majesty, resisting the violence of the winds and the corrosions of time, looking calmly down upon the passing generations of men, a witness to the being of God and the permanence of religion, and a minister to all that is highest and best in the life of man.

The relation of this house to Brown University has been most intimate from the beginning until now. The first two Presidents, Manning and Maxcy, were pastors of this church. All the other Presidents have made this their spiritual home. An invitation to the Presidency has seemed to include an invitation to membership in this Church of Christ, and the line of succession has not been broken. Many of the Professors and Instructors have identified themselves with the life that

\* In 1856 the granite posts and iron chains which had for many years enclosed a semi-circular area at the front entrance were removed, and the wooden buildings at the south-west corner of the grounds, which had stood for nearly seventy years, were taken down.

has been lived in this house of God, giving to it generously of their wisdom and strength, helping and guiding its activities, and receiving in return those spiritual influences which flow from a frequented sanctuary and intelligent worship, and mould the intellectual as well as the moral life of man. Many of the students, as the classes have come and gone, have formed an abiding attachment for the hallowed associations of this Meeting-house, and have carried away its picture as a sacred memento of College days and, as it were, an integral part of the College plant. For one hundred and seventeen years the Commencement processions have moved down the hill, each so like its predecessors, only longer, and have been welcomed within these spacious walls, and here in this house Baccalaureate sermons have been preached and farewell words have been spoken, orations have been delivered and degrees conferred, until all over this land, and in many lands, there are thousands of graduates who still feel upon their spirits the benediction of Alma Mater, made doubly sacred because received in this ancient and familiar house of prayer. In some true sense there belongs to this Meeting-house, situated at the base of College Hill and used so constantly for College purposes, according to its ancient dedication, the title, which it has often received, of the "University Church." It has helped to preserve the connection which should ever exist between education and religion, and has been a perpetual protest against any divorce of learning from piety. As another has said, "Knowledge without common sense is folly; without method it is



waste ; without charity it is fanaticism ; without religion it is death."

The service of this house cannot be fully estimated unless it is considered in its relation to the moral life of the community in which for so long a period of time it has stood. By its silent and conspicuous presence, by the knowledge of the unmistakable purpose to which it has been set apart, by its never-failing angelus sounding forth into the homes of the community and into the weary ears of toiling and tempted men, as well as by the lofty ethical teachings of its pulpit, and its unceasing defence of the Christian Sunday as a Divine institution, it has rendered an incalculable service to good morals and to the peace and prosperity of society. It has been a preacher of righteousness to all men, not only to those who have entered its gates, opening in invitation North and South and East and West, but to all who have passed by, and come under the silent spell of its sacred presence. There has been moral health even in its shadow. But to those who have willingly listened to its ever-repeated enunciations of moral truth, and have been brought face to face with its high ethical standards, week after week, and year after year, and generation after generation, it has ministered strength of purpose, purity of motive, noble ideals of personal and social life, which, if they have not made this fair city of our habitation Augustine's "City of God," have assisted in keeping its name pure, its homes sweet, its prevailing sentiment uncorrupt, its business methods honest, and its life measurably upright and temperate

and praiseworthy, a city attractive for business enterprise and diversified industry, safe and beautiful for the family, and favorable for the mental and moral training of the young. If, as has been said, "the end of civil government is to make it easy for the citizens to do right and difficult for them to do wrong," Providence has gone far towards realizing that sublime end. And this sanctuary, with kindred sanctuaries of like purpose, though of lesser age, has been God's instrument for a century and a quarter in promoting personal and civic righteousness. It has been a fountain of untold moral value to the whole community.

This house of worship has rendered memorable service, also, during all these years in the proclamation and preservation of the truth of revelation. One principal function of a Meeting-house is to furnish the place and the occasion for the utterance of Divine truth. Teaching or preaching, in the judgment of Protestantism, is to have a prominent place in public worship. Christianity by no means overlooks the ancient exhortation, "Oh, come, let us worship and bow down ; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker ;" but it solemnly adds, "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." The altar, Jewish or heathen, has evermore given place to the Christian pulpit. The priestly class has been swallowed up forever in the universal priesthood of God's people. All disciples are "kings and priests unto God." Christ's ministry is not primarily for the administration of rites and ceremonies, but for the preaching

of the Word. As the spiritual Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, so the material building, which is also often, but unfortunately, called by metonymy a church, is for the presentation and expounding of the same revealed truth. This consecrated house has not failed to perform its divinely ordained function. For twelve decades and a half its walls have echoed with the spoken Gospel of the Son of God. James Manning, Jonathan Maxcy, Stephen Gano, Robert E. Pattison, William Hague, James N. Granger, Samuel L. Caldwell, Edward G. Taylor, and T. Edwin Brown, as regular pastors of this Church, and John Stanford, John C. Stockbridge, William C. Richards and Francis Wayland, as acting pastors for a limited time,\* have stood in this pulpit as the ministers of Christ and of His people, and have given utterance to the Divine, the saving, the unchangeable truths of Christian faith, truths on which this building and pulpit were founded, and which they were erected to declare and defend. They were men of different natural gifts, and temperaments, and attainments, yet one in spirit and in purpose; of different styles of expression and different methods of operation, yet one in motive and in aim; many ministers, but one ministry, unified in the truth and in the love of God. And what a ministry it has been! Earnest, intelligent, loyal to the Word of Life, honored of God and of men, a blessing to this Church, to this city and to the world. All were

\* During Dr. Wm. Hague's absence for nine months in Europe in 1838-9, the pulpit was supplied by Rev. Handel G. Nott. During Dr. James N. Granger's absence on an official visit to the missions of the American Baptist Missionary Union in India, after Dr. John C. Stockbridge's service for one year closed, Rev. Francis Smith supplied the pulpit from October, 1853, to May, 1854.

diligent sowers of the good seed of the Kingdom, and all were permitted to reap in greater or in less abundance, often, perhaps always, one sowing and another reaping, and now all, with a single exception,\* are gathered home in the heavenly garner, to rejoice together, and to see, as they could not see here, the truth of God in its undimmed brightness, and the fruit of their labors in its glorious maturity.

As is well known, this Church has never formulated any creedal statement, and has never adopted any articles of faith formulated by others. Its origin was in the transition period of religious thought. Its founders found themselves able to unite in the simple essentials of Christian faith and obedience, and probably no farther. Soul-liberty with them meant liberty of private interpretation and exemption from all creed-subscription. Yet the ties which bound them together have outlived all agitations and all discussions. This house and this pulpit have stood for a definite something; if they had not, they would have disappeared long ago. Possibly the very liberty which has here been enjoyed, freedom for all and not toleration by any, has the more conduced to the preservation of "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

The difference of view in reference to "the laying on of hands," which existed at the beginning of the Church,† survived into the present century, sometimes

\* Rev. T. Edwin Brown, D. D., who was pastor of this Church from 1882 to 1890, is now pastor of the Baptist Church in Franklin, Pa.

† See Dr. Caldwell's Discourse in Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Church, pp. 40-43, and The Mother Church, 45-57.

one party and sometimes the other being in the majority. The Anti-Masonic controversy, which raged from 1803 to 1832, disturbed this Church, as it disturbed others, but led to no disfellowship of the friends of the order, of whom the pastor was one. It ceased completely with the withdrawal of the member who led the opposition. A few members withdrew and became the followers of Mr. Murray near the beginning of the century.\* A few others, and more prominent ones, found the views of Dr. Channing more in harmony with their convictions of truth than those held by the great body of the Church, and sought more congenial fellowship.\* But during all discussions and agitations, without and within, this pulpit has given no uncertain sound, and has proclaimed, with malice towards none and charity

\* Rev. John Murray was the founder of Universalism in this country, and was the pastor of the first society of that denomination organized in Gloucester, Mass. He had previously preached in Newport, R. I., and in other places in New England. In the spring of 1775 he was appointed chaplain of the three regiments of the Rhode Island line, which were encamped before Boston. This appointment was probably secured through Gen. Greene, with whom he seems to have been intimately acquainted. He was born in England in 1741, came to this country in 1770, and died in Boston, September 3, 1815.

\* Rev. William Ellery Channing was born in Newport, R. I., in 1780, and died in 1842. He was the acknowledged head of the Unitarian movement in America, and by his preaching and publications, wielded a wide influence. During the last years of his life his summers were uniformly spent in Newport. The views which he advocated found adherents not only in this community, but among some of the influential members of this Church. In 1818 an anonymous pamphlet appeared, advocating the Arian doctrine of the person and work of Christ. This pamphlet was ascribed to Judge Samuel Eddy, who soon after withdrew from the fellowship of the Church. It was believed by some persons that the President of the College at that time was in sympathy with these views. In February, 1819, it was proposed to "suspend the communion until the difficulty that now exists in the Church is settled." This proposition did not prevail. In July of the same year the Church felt constrained to pass the following vote, "That this Church has no fellowship with those who openly and avowedly deny the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ."

towards all, the essential doctrines of the evangelical faith ; and this sanctuary has preserved, like an illuminated window, upon which the light of heaven falls, the inspired legend, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

It remains to say a few words upon that which is most important of all, viz., the relation of this sanctuary to the beginning and development of the spiritual life of a great multitude of men and women who have worshipped here. This Meeting-house has been the meeting place of many a contrite heart with its forgiving Lord. Within these consecrated walls, in the stillness of this house of prayer, under the presentation of God's Word, uttered, now in tones of righteous reproof, and now in notes as tender and persuasive as infinite Love, the human spirit has yielded to the touch of the Divine Spirit, and there have come to it new visions of God and duty, new joys and purposes, new aspirations and hopes, and the spirit that had been estranged from God has been brought into blessed and everlasting fellowship with the Author of life and peace and salvation. Then it has been found true in vital experience that "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." God only knows of how many men and women, young men and maidens, a goodly company of whom still live and are helpers in the Church, and more of whom have passed on to the service above, it can be said they were born here into the new life, which is the life of God, and here that life has been nourished and

strengthened, and has grown to a beautiful maturity and far-reaching usefulness under the divinely appointed means of grace.

The wayward have here been reclaimed from their wanderings ; the weak and the tempted have here waited upon God and renewed their strength for the burdens and the conflicts of life ; the perplexed and troubled have here sought and found the wisdom which God has promised to give liberally, and the peace that passes all understanding ; the bereaved and sorrowing have come to this place for comfort and needed consolation, and have not come in vain ; souls that were bowed to the earth under God's mysterious appointments have here been enabled to drop their burdens at His feet and bear a song away ; here the indolent and the selfish have felt the quickening inspirations of the new life, and have been set free to render to their generation a more Christ-like service, and to do the will of God more perfectly. God has refreshed His people again and again and again out of this sanctuary ; their spirits have been borne heavenward, away from the earthly and the sensual, on the strong wings of prayer and praise, and our Lord's petition for His disciples has found perpetual answer—"Sanctify them by the truth : Thy Word is truth."

It is this spiritual service that has been going on in this Meeting-house during all these years of its existence, which gives to it its special sacredness and its highest glory. Within this material temple the spiritual temple has been going up, rising gradually, silently, invisibly, planned by no human architect, builded of no

decaying material, beautiful beyond the most elaborate and costly structures of men's hands—the temple of redeemed and sanctified souls, “In whom you also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.”

A sketch, all too imperfect, has now been given of this venerable building, and of the purposes which it has served, educational, moral and religious, for the College, for the community, for the Church of Christ. Its walls are written all over with the story of funerals, of weddings, of baptisms, and of the commemoration of great events of local or of national interest, when the citizens have claimed it as their own, the fitting place in which to give expression to a common joy or sorrow, and seek for it the sanctifying influence of God and religion. It is the oldest public building within the limits of this ancient city, and our neighbors, as well as ourselves, have a feeling of tender pride in it, if not a sense of ownership. The feet of nearly four generations have crossed its thresholds. Many have gone forth from it to other communities and to other communions, whose thoughts often revert with gratitude to this house with its hallowed associations and moulding influences upon character and life. If they and their living descendants could come back to us on this anniversary occasion, the hospitable sanctuary and the spacious grounds would not be able to contain a tithe of the multitude that would assemble. Many, God only knows how many, have found this place not only their spiritual home and their Mount of Transfiguration, but



their Mount of Olivet, and from this place, when the worship of earth was ended, their spirits have ascended to the home and the temple on high.

To us who remain has fallen this priceless heritage, this heirloom of the pious fathers and mothers, who loved God and truth and worship. It is ours to love it as they loved it, and all for which it stands, and to remember that God's day and God's Word and God's house stand or fall together, and are the foundations of religion and the eternal bulwarks of social purity and prosperity. It is ours to care sacredly for this old sanctuary, and to preserve it, if possible, to other generations, to see that it is kept fresh and beautiful and in good repair, showing no signs of decay and no evidence of neglect, lest people find it the measure of our piety, our reverence and our love for Christ. It is ours to use it for ourselves and for our children conscientiously and prayerfully, enabling it to minister to our growing faith, to our deepening spiritual life, and to our ever enlarging service for God ; and to use it also for our neighbors, that it may have for them, who are alike needy with ourselves, hospitable welcome, and that they may enjoy the inestimable blessing of its refining, elevating and saving influence. May its gracious privilege never be perverted by any of us into final condemnation. May an open sanctuary never be followed by a shut heaven. Let us ever enter into these gates with devout thanksgiving and into these courts with sincere praise, that at last we may be permitted to enter in through the gates into the holy city, which, like this earthly temple, "lieth

four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth," whose gates, like ours, open to the four points of the compass, and whose worship of the once crucified but now exalted Lamb of God shall be without weariness, without imperfection and without sin.

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### Anniversary Hymn.

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O Thou, with whom a thousand years  
Are but as yesterday when past,  
Our fathers' God, 'mid hopes and fears,  
Their children's God, while life shall last ;

We lift to Thee our heartfelt praise,  
Assembled in Thy courts to-day,  
Recall the memories of Thy grace,  
The wonders of Thy perfect way.

This house of prayer the fathers raised,  
In faith sublime and wisdom true,  
And still it stands—Thy name be praised ;  
To-day we give it Thee anew.

Through the long century's golden span  
Its spire has pointed to the skies ;  
Thy glory and the good of man,  
The end of all its ministries.

Beneath the shade of spreading boughs,  
Made strong and fruitful by Thy love,  
We joyful meet and pay our vows  
To Thee, who hearest from above.

Life, growth and fruitage are bestowed  
By Thy divine and sovereign will ;  
The past owns Thee its gracious God,  
And hope rests sweetly on Thee still.





